

Schlesinger On Kennedy

A THOUSAND DAYS: John F. Kennedy in the White House. By Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. 1,087 pages. Houghton Mifflin. \$9.

THIS is a superb and important book. It ought to be "must" reading for all future presidential candidates and aspiring White House aides even though it might thin their ranks. It should also be read by anyone wanting to discuss Vietnam, Cuba, civil rights or any of the other major issues involving the Government of the United States because of its important background materials. Arthur Schlesinger has been even more successful than Theodore Sorensen in producing a work of contemporary history of first rate quality and importance.

The author has been known in his profession as a very political historian in a partisan sense. One of his books found support for the New Deal in Jacksonian Democracy while the first volume of his unfinished series on the Franklin Roosevelt Administration left the impression that an inept Herbert Hoover and the Republican party were chiefly responsible for the stock market crash and the world depression. The author was also active in Adlai Stevenson's campaigns of 1952 and 1956 and only shifted his allegiance to Kennedy at Los Angeles in 1960.

He writes then with the values of a liberal Northern Democrat, but within this framework he comes surprisingly close to the unattainable goal of objectivity. Since he has viewed two previous presidential regimes in a detailed analysis he is able to pick out the most salient details, to ask the important questions



ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR.

and to offer judgments which have some depth.

When President-elect Kennedy added Schlesinger to his staff he knew that he was hiring an historian who would be tempted to write of his White House years. On occasion he jokingly warned Schlesinger against making too much of his position, and he did ask that no staff members keep detailed accounts of conversations as a threat to freedom of expression.

But after the Bay of Pigs disaster Kennedy changed his mind. He told Schlesinger that "You can be damn sure that the CIA has its record and the joint chiefs theirs. We'd better be sure that we have a record over here." On that basis Schlesinger kept a full account of subsequent important conferences. Although he does not disclose his

sources, he has been given access to and the right to use documents which other historians are not likely to see for decades. A footnoted manuscript of the book has been filed in the Kennedy library to be used after "an appropriate interval."

On State Department

The matter which aroused the most attention in the earlier serializing of this book was the treatment of Secretary of State Rusk and the reporting of Kennedy's decision to replace him. In the fuller version Rusk appears as only one aspect of the President's frustrating experience with the State Department bureaucracy. The Pentagon also had built-in resistance to change, but Kennedy seems to have felt that Secretary McNamara was making some headway. State remained relatively unchanged in its devotion to older and often discredited policies.

All of Kennedy's major actions in foreign affairs—the test ban treaty, the Alliance for Progress, the American University speech and the tense negotiations over the Cuban missile crisis—were handled with little assistance from the State Department. On some crucial occasions Rusk seemed willing to have the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the CIA invade and take over the decisions which rightly should have been made by the State Department.

Latin America

Schlesinger was strongly interested in Latin-American affairs and writes a full report on the innovation and operation of the Alianza. For those who think

that the Good Neighbor Policy has been a cornerstone since the second Roosevelt it will come as a surprise, as it did to Schlesinger, that a single Communist country, Yugoslavia, with only 18,000,000 people received more American money in the period 1945-1960 than did all of Latin America with its almost 200,000,000 largely impoverished peoples. Kennedy was strongly critical of this neglect and of what Schlesinger calls "the Pentagon's chronic need to dispose of obsolescent weapons" which led to the dumping of large quantities of arms on Latin American governments.

Foreign affairs rightly takes up much of the volume, but due attention is also given to the domestic issues, particularly civil rights. The role of Robert Kennedy is also handled in ways which will interest those who consider him a future White House possibility.

Many Light Touches

There are many light touches as well, one involving Robert. During World War II PT boat commander Jack Kennedy in the Pacific received a picture of his younger brother being sworn into the Navy at the age of 17. But what Jack claimed as his chief concern was the discovery that Bob had appropriated his checked London-tailored coat; "I'd like to know what the hell I'm doing out here while you go stroking around in my drape coat, but I suppose that is what we are out here for."

"A Thousand Days" is a long book with a little more than a page for each day, but it is a richly rewarding book. It will probably be read by many future generations for its penetration into the great complexities which beset a nation and its political leaders in a time of revolutionary change and in a world of troubles.

WILLIAM L. NEUMANN,
Professor of History,
Goucher College.